

The Fourth Word: 'My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?' Matthew 27:46

About the ninth hour Jesus cried out in a loud voice, "Eloi, Eloi, lama sabachthani?"—which means, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?"

Urs von Balthazar, perhaps one of the most significant Catholic theologians of the twentieth century, sees this line as the ultimate exposure of the mystery of the cosmic Christ, for Jesus has been utterly abandoned by God. Christ is fully exposed in this passage as dying, his humanity realized in the inevitable decay of his body. The unbreakable union with God's identification with humanity is reinforced in this exposure of Christ's earthly nature. We rarely feel abandoned by God in our culture, yet we have a great capacity to abandon God in our own self-seeking. We go about our lives, often forgetting those in turmoil, struck with poverty, violence and disease. We often neglect to think about our fellow Christians, around the world, who are denied the basic freedoms we take for granted in our society. Furthermore, when we look at these people, those suffering from war in the Middle East, particularly, at this time, in Gaza, we witness their constant faith in God, their undying trust.

This past summer, during my visit to the Middle East, my father and I traveled to Gaza, when the outbreak of violence between Hamas and Fatah was beginning to calm. We were among the few internationals to enter the area in weeks. After being held for hours by security personnel at the Erez Israeli Terminal, we finally found ourselves behind "the Wall". We were surrounded by devastation; buildings in wreckage after bombings, abandoned streets, for people were too scared to leave their homes, and starving animals wandering the roads. We visited the hospital compound, where the church, of which my father was incumbent for three years, was in shambles. The hospital director told us they had just used the last of their anaesthetic after operating that morning on six victims hit by an Israeli missile. She told us that she finds her only hope in God. Everyone we spoke to that day was scared and devastated, but they continued to thank God, and to ask for his blessing.

Why don't people in Gaza feel abandoned by God? Why do they continue to rely on him through their strife, when we turn away in our decadence?

Christ's abandonment unites us to him. Our vocation becomes to unite ourselves to his sacrifice. This means never abandoning the oppressed in their suffering, but living in solidarity with them through their adversity. We must constantly ask ourselves the question, "What is it to suffer?" We must ask ourselves this, and not turn away.

Kristi Assaly: Good Friday 2008